

REPORT

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Mayor Johnston and Members of Council
Date: January 22, 2024

From: Jackie Teed, Director
Climate Action, Planning and
Development
File: Doc#2430186-v1

Item #: 2024-34

Subject: Food Security Update and Funding Request

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to allocate \$30,000 from the Affordable Housing Fund for the purpose of retrofitting the City-owned Annex at 302 Royal Avenue to accommodate the Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society's weekly food distribution program.

THAT Council allocate \$4,160 to support the continuation of the St. Barnabas - Shiloh Fifth Avenue and Hope Omid food security programs in 2024.

THAT Council direct staff to continue discussions with the Don't Go Hungry Food Program, and other organizations operating food security programs in New Westminster, to explore opportunities for collaboration, including developing a case for support to realize donor, foundation and senior government funding.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is threefold: (1) to update Council on a possible new location for the Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society's weekly food distribution program in New Westminster; (2) to request one-time financial support for two food security programs with emergent needs; and (3) to provide an update on the Don't Go Hungry Program and other organizations operating food security programs in New Westminster.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food banks and community meal programs are meeting a significant need in British Columbia. According to Food Bank Canada's 2023 Hunger Count, there were almost 200,000 visits to food banks in British Columbia in March 2023, representing a 20%

increase compared to March 2022. This trend is consistent in New Westminster, with local food hamper programs reporting consistently higher numbers over the past year. Moreover, food prices in Canada increased by 8.9% during 2022, while general inflation increased by 6.8% during this same year.

On November 27, 2023, staff presented a report to Council on the issues and uncertainties facing two food security programs in New Westminster: (1) the ceasing of operations of the Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society's weekly food distribution program at Olivet Baptist Church; and (2) the Don't Go Hungry (DGH) Program's need for additional funding to sustain its operations.

At the same time, other community-based food security programs are oversubscribed and facing challenges, including related to funding for rent and utilities, purchasing of additional food and equipment; and securing of staff and volunteer support. Given the large number of community members who rely on these programs, City staff met on November 9, 2023 to discuss the situation related to the GVFBS and the DGH Food Program. City staff also convened a meeting on December 12, 2023 with organizations operating food security programs in New Westminster to discuss challenges, opportunities for collaboration, and next steps.

BACKGROUND

The following is a summary of the various food security programs underway in New Westminster, including number of individuals supported.

Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society - This weekly food distribution program currently operates out of Olivet Baptist Church at 613 Queens Avenue between 9:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on Wednesdays. The program scans between 250 and 350 client cards and serves between 650 and 950 individuals on a weekly basis. The last day of this program at this location is February 15, 2024.

Don't Go Hungry Food Program - Currently operates in three neighbourhoods: Queensborough (Community Centre), Sapperton (Trinity Sapperton, formerly Knox Presbyterian Church) and the West End (Trinity West-End, formerly St. Aidan's Presbyterian Church). In total, the three sites distribute free grocery hampers to over 270 households containing over 880 individuals on a weekly basis. Sixty percent of the clients served are families, with one-third being children.

Dan's Legacy and Aunt Leah's - Provide approximately 100 hampers weekly on Mondays and Wednesdays to youth clients at Aunt Leah's.

Gurdwara Sahib Sukh Sagar - Provides two meals a day, at lunch and dinner, to anyone in need.

Holy Trinity Cathedral - Provides a hot meal every Saturday, serving approximately 70 people weekly.

Hope Omid - Serves approximately 250 households weekly, which includes a delivery component for those who cannot attend in person, specifically seniors.

Lower Mainland Purpose Society - Provides approximately 170 hampers weekly, representing approximately 470 people. Purpose Society also provides various other food supports at their Friday Market, through the Health Van, at the Health Contact Centre, and the Nightly Shelter, supporting approximately 900 people weekly. The Youth Hub also provides dinner to approximately 90 individuals weekly. In total, Purpose Society’s food security initiatives support approximately 1,460 people weekly.

Salvation Army - Provides approximately 150 hampers weekly, representing approximately 450 people weekly.

St. Barnabas - Shiloh Fifth Avenue Church - Provides approximately 180 hampers weekly, representing approximately 625 people weekly. Average weekly household composition: 6% singles, 20% couples (includes single parents with one child), and 73% families.

St. Vincent De Paul - Provides hot meals two days per week on Mondays and Fridays representing approximately 65 people weekly.

Union Gospel Mission - Provides approximately 1,150 meals to approximately 575 people weekly.

EXISTING POLICY/PRACTICE

Existing policy is summarized within Attachment #1.

ANALYSIS

Increasing Need for Food Security Programming

Food banks and community meal programs are meeting a significant need in British Columbia. According to Food Bank Canada’s 2023 Hunger Count, there were almost 200,000 visits to food banks in British Columbia in March 2023, representing a 20% increase compared to March 2022. This trend is consistent in New Westminster, with local food hamper programs reporting consistently higher numbers over the past year. Moreover, food prices in Canada increased by 8.9% during 2022, while general inflation increased by 6.8% during this same year.

DISCUSSION

On November 27, 2023, staff presented a report to Council on the issues and uncertainties facing two food security programs in New Westminster: (1) the ceasing of operations of the Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society’s weekly food distribution program at Olivet Baptist Church; and (2) the Don’t Go Hungry (DGH) Program’s need for additional funding to sustain its operations.

Community-based food security programs serving New Westminster are oversubscribed and facing challenges, including related to funding for rent and utilities, purchasing of additional food and equipment; and securing of staff and volunteer support. Given the large number of community members who rely on these programs, City staff met on November 9, 2023 to discuss the situation related to two food security programs, the Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society and the Don't Go Hungry (DGH) Food Program. City staff also convened a meeting on December 12, 2023 with organizations operating food security programs in New Westminster to discuss current challenges, opportunities for collaboration, and next steps.

Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society

City staff identified five possible sites for the relocation of the Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society's weekly food distribution program. Following an exploration of these sites, the GVFB and City staff determined that the former Museum and Archives Annex at 302 Royal Avenue could be a suitable site for their weekly food distribution program, pending potential building retrofits.

Staff compiled a high-level estimate of what it may cost to retrofit the building to support the new proposed use, pending structural analysis and development of a full scope. The early estimate, based on available data but not informed by an engineer's input, is \$30,000.

The estimate includes a consultant project manager (\$10,000), a structural engineer (\$5,000), a hazmat assessment (\$2,500), hazmat abatement (\$5,000), a contractor (\$5,000), and a contingency (\$2,500). An engineer has been engaged and staff are awaiting feedback on the feasibility of a structural retrofit. Assuming a feasible solution can be designed, staff will move rapidly to complete the retrofit with a funding strategy in place. Staff propose that funds be allocated from the Affordable Housing Fund, given the high priority of maintaining this important program in New Westminster. If the cost of retrofit exceeds this estimate, staff will return with an additional funding request.

In terms of staff capacity, this work will displace time spent on Massey Theatre and the Fire Department Facility Feasibility Study in Q1 of 2024.

Local Community-Based Food Programs

On December 12, 2023, staff met with organizations operating food security programs in New Westminster. All participants stated they would benefit from additional funding to sustain their operations and that they are striving to respond to the increasing demand for food supports in New Westminster. The need for funding is to assist with rent and utilities, additional food and equipment; and staff and volunteer support. Additionally, all participants stated that City support and advocacy with regard to accessing grants and senior government funding would be of benefit to realizing a more financially sustainable operating model.

Two organizations stated that they are in immediate need of support in order to continue their programs in 2024. St. Barnabas - Shiloh Fifth Avenue requires \$2,000 to pay for the increased amount of cardboard and increased electricity costs associated with the increasing demand for their program. Hope Omid requires \$2,160 for rent and green bin fee in order to continue their operations in 2024. There is the possibility that Hope Omid could also operate out of the Museum and Archives Annex, which would eliminate their need for rental assistance.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

This report has involved staff from Community Planning, Building Department, Civic Buildings and Properties, and the Intergovernmental Relations Office.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is capacity in the 2024 Affordable Housing Fund to allocate \$30,000 to retrofit the Annex building at 302 Royal Avenue and to support the affordable housing projects anticipated to advance in 2024.

The budget required to respond to the urgent needs of St. Barnabas - Shiloh Fifth Avenue and Hope Omid is \$4,160, for which Finance staff would identify a funding source, should Council so direct.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented to Council for consideration:

- 1. That Council direct staff to allocate \$30,000 from the Affordable Housing Fund for the purpose of retrofitting the City-owned Annex at 302 Royal Avenue to accommodate the Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society’s weekly food distribution program.
- 2. That Council allocate \$4,160 to support the continuation of the St. Barnabas - Shiloh Fifth Avenue and Hope Omid food security programs in 2024.
- 3. That Council direct staff to continue discussions with the Don’t Go Hungry Food Program, and other organizations operating food security programs in New Westminster, to explore opportunities for collaboration, including developing a case for support to realize donor, foundation and senior government funding.
- 4. That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommends options 1, 2 and 3.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Existing Policy/Practice

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
Claudia Freire, Social Planner

This report was reviewed by:
John Stark, Manager, Community Planning

This report was approved by:
Jackie Teed, Director, Climate Action, Planning and Development
Lisa Leblanc, Acting Chief Administrative Officer